
Why Do We Train for Light Search and Rescue?

When disaster strikes, everyone wants to help. As a CERT member, you will be prepared to assist in a safe and effective manner.

- Disaster survivors may need help, but untrained spontaneous rescuers can place themselves in dangerous situations and become victims.
- CERT members are trained to size up the situation to determine the risk involved. CERT member safety is always the first priority when determining if rescuing others should be attempted.

CERT Search and Rescue Overview

As a CERT member, you will be trained to assist in light search and rescue. Light search and rescue means:

- Making rescue decisions based on two objectives: To protect rescuer safety and to rescue the greatest number of people in the shortest amount of time.
- Rescuing lightly trapped victims first.
- Avoiding damaged structures or situations that are clearly unsafe to CERT members.

Components of Search and Rescue

CERT search and rescue has three components:

- Sizeup
- Search Operations
- Rescue Operations

Sizeup

You—the rescuer—are the most important person in a rescue attempt. Effective sizeup helps you protect yourself.

Sizeup is the information-gathering and decisionmaking process for deciding **whether** to attempt a rescue and **how** to proceed.

Components of Search and Rescue (Continued)

Search Operations

In locating potential victims, you need to use search techniques that:

- Protect your safety.
 - Are systematic and thorough.
 - Avoid duplication of effort.
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Rescue Operations

Rescue involves three main functions:

- Creating a safe environment
 - Triaging or stabilizing victims
 - Removing victims
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Rescuer Safety

CERT rescuers perform only light search and rescue, avoiding heavily damaged structures. Regardless of the severity of structural damage, rescuer safety must be the primary concern.

The two most frequent causes of rescuer deaths are:

- Disorientation.
 - Secondary collapse.
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Safe Practice 1: Use Protective Equipment

Always wear personal protective equipment, including:

- Gloves.
- Goggles.
- Dust mask.
- Helmet.
- Work boots.

The primary cause of rescuer problems after working in a structural collapse is from breathing dust. A dust mask is **essential!**

Safe Practice 2: Work as a Team

Successful search and rescue depends on teamwork! When performing search and rescue:

- **Use a buddy system.** Always work in pairs, and have a third person available to act as a runner.
 - **Have backup teams available.** Having backup teams allows teams to rotate, prevents fatigue, and ensures that help is available if a team gets into trouble. All teams need to drink fluids and eat to keep themselves fresh.
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Safe Practice 3: Put Rescuer Safety First

Rescuer safety always has top priority. When considering a search and rescue attempt:

- Conduct a thorough sizeup.
 - Make rescuer safety the number one priority in any decision to attempt a rescue.
 - Never enter a structure that you determine has heavy damage.
 - Limit the amount of time that CERTs spend in moderately damaged buildings.
 - Never search an area covered by water.
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Safe Practice 4: Be Alert for Hazards

Sizeup is an ongoing process. Look up, down, and all around for safety hazards. Before entering a building, evaluate it from all sides. Constantly reevaluate the situation to identify hazards and changing conditions that could compromise your safety, such as:

- Power lines.
 - Natural gas leaks.
 - Hazardous materials.
 - Sharp objects.
 - Overhead objects that could fall.
 - Holes in flooring.
 - Water.
 - Smoke.
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Search and Rescue Sizeup

Effective sizeup is crucial when performing search and rescue operations.

Sizeup Step 1: Gather Facts

Accurate fact-gathering must precede damage assessment. During this step, you'll need to consider such factors as:

- Time and day.
 - At night, more people will be in their homes, so the greatest need for search and rescue will be in residential settings. During the day, people will be at work, so the need will be greater in commercial buildings.
 - During evenings and on weekends, availability of some emergency services may be restricted.
 - The amount of daylight available may affect search and rescue operations.
 - Type of structure.
 - The purpose for which the structure was designed may indicate the likely number of victims and their locations (e.g., an apartment building vs. a warehouse).
 - Some types of construction (e.g., mobile homes, unreinforced brick) are more susceptible to damage than others.
 - Occupancy.
 - Is the structure occupied?
 - If so, how many people are likely to be in the building?
 - Where are they likely to be located?
 - Are there special considerations (e.g., children, elderly, disabled)?
 - Weather.
 - Severe weather may affect both victims and rescuers. It can hamper rescue efforts, limit the time period during which search and rescue can occur, and affect how long trapped victims can survive.
 - Hazards.
 - Identifying other potential hazards in the general and immediate areas is important to search and rescue efforts.
 - Time lost trying to locate and shut off utilities can increase loss of life.
 - CERTs should never undertake search and rescue if there are indications of terrorism (biological, chemical, radiological, or secondary explosive devices). Leave the area immediately!
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Search and Rescue Sizeup (Continued)

Sizeup Step 2: Assess and Communicate Damage

The CERT mission changes according to the level of structural damage.

- Light damage
 - Superficial damage
 - Broken windows
 - Fallen or cracked plaster
 - Minor damage to interior contents

CERT mission: Locate, triage, and prioritize removal of victims.

- Moderate damage
 - Visible signs of damage
 - Decorative work damaged or fallen
 - Many visible cracks in plaster
 - Major damage to interior contents
 - Building still on foundation

CERT mission: Locate, triage, and immediately evacuate victims to a safe area.

Minimize the number of rescuers inside the structure.

- Heavy damage
 - Partial or total collapse
 - Tilting
 - Obvious structural instability
 - Building off foundation

CERT mission: Secure the building perimeter. Warn others of the danger in entering the building. Do not enter the building under any circumstances!

Completing the Damage Assessment

When completing a damage assessment for search and rescue:

- Be sure to do a "lap around" and look at all sides of the building.
- Consider probable amounts of damage based on the type and age of construction.
- If in doubt about the level of damage, err on the safe side: Assume the heavier level of damage.

Be sure to communicate your findings to the CERT command post or responding agencies.

Search and Rescue Sizeup (Continued)

Sizeup Step 3: Consider Probabilities

Considering what probably will—or could—happen is of critical importance to search and rescue teams. During sizeup, the team needs to identify potentially life-threatening hazards. Think about:

- How stable the situation really is.
 - What else could go wrong.
 - How these probabilities, if they occurred, would affect search and rescue operations.
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Sizeup Step 4: Assess Your Situation

The next step is to assess your situation, drawing on everything learned in the previous steps. Your assessment should determine:

- Whether the situation is safe enough to continue.
 - The risks faced by rescuers if they continue.
 - Resource requirements for safely conducting the operation.
 - Resource availability.
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Sizeup Steps 5 and 6: Establish Priorities and Make Decisions

Next, you will need to prioritize and make decisions about the tasks before you. These steps will be guided by:

- The underlying CERT priorities.
- Your team's evaluation of the current situation.

Resources should be deployed to do the most good while ensuring CERT member safety.

Tasks that involve removing known dangers must be done first—before beginning the search or the rescue. For example, turning off leaking gas from outside the building should be done before searching the building.

Sizeup Step 7: Develop Action Plans

During this step, the Team Leader will decide specifically how personnel and other resources will be deployed and how the team will proceed with the search and rescue operation.

Because incidents requiring search and rescue operations are often somewhat complex, it may be helpful to develop a simple written plan.

Written notes can help focus the operation and will provide documentation that your team can share with responding agencies.

Search and Rescue Sizeup (Continued)

Sizeup Steps 8 and 9: Take Action and Evaluate Progress

Sizeup is a continual process. As the search and rescue team takes action, ongoing evaluation is crucial for maintaining a safe environment.

The information gained through evaluation needs to be fed back into the decisionmaking process so that priorities and action plans can be revised when needed.

Lesson Summary

- CERT search and rescue includes initial sizeup, search operations, and rescue operations.
 - The goals of CERT search and rescue are to protect rescuer safety and to rescue as many victims as possible as quickly as possible.
 - Search and rescue teams protect rescuer safety by wearing personal protective equipment, working as a team, putting rescuer safety first, doing ongoing sizeup, and remaining alert to changing situations.
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